

PACKAGED IMPACT: A STRUCTURED COMMUNICATION SKILLS WORKSHOP

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The study was designed to assess the impact of a structured communications skills workshop of self-referred clients who expressed problems in feeling uncomfortable, awkward, or isolated in their relationships with others. Subjects were assigned randomly to one of two experimental groups or a waiting list control group. During a 7-week treatment period, the two experimental groups, one consisting of seven subjects and the other consisting of eight subjects, received the structured workshop. The control group of 15 subjects received no treatment. Pretest and posttest results indicated a significant difference between the experimental and control groups with respect to scores on the criterion measures and favored the group receiving the Communication Skills Workshop in terms of (a) reduced anxiety in interpersonal situations and (b) reported increase in establishing interpersonal relationships.

In assessing the problems of various counseling centers' client populations, the authors noted that many clients presented problems concerning inefficiency in interpersonal skills. The three areas frequently presented as problematical were the inability to establish interpersonal relationships with one or more people, feelings of inadequacy in relating to the opposite sex, and feelings of anxiety in group settings. These persons, in effect, had become accustomed to perceiving themselves as socially inadequate. Perhaps if these socially awkward students could develop a more functional repertoire of interpersonal communication skills, they would experience more rewarding interpersonal relationships.

If an effective group experience could be designed to deal with the above concerns, a number of by-products would accrue: (a) personal growth would be accelerated due

to group interactions, (b) the center's waiting list for individual therapy would be reduced, and (c) pilot efforts would be mounted to ascertain the effectiveness of this approach with divergent populations beyond the center.

To meet this need, a structured Communication Skills Workshop was developed for the purpose of assisting group members to develop more efficient interpersonal skills.³ The rationale came from a variety of related sources. For example, Steele (1968) indicated that designing specific workshop experiences in which the behavioral objectives are clear, would be most effective for those clients who present identified needs that are in contrast to an open-ended, non-structured, sensitivity training experience. This concept provided the basic assumption to be tested in the search for a vehicle to assist the client who came to the center with specific problems in human relations.

In order to deal with the presented problems mentioned above, the Communication Skills Workshop was designed to focus on

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³ A Communication Skills Workshop Manual is available (\$4) from the University Counseling Center, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80521.

four target areas: (a) developing a readiness for appropriate self-disclosure (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958); (b) learning how to give and receive functional positive and negative feedback (Miles, 1958); (c) practicing specific behavior change goals related to personal problem areas (Frank, 1969; Weigel, 1969); and (d) learning how to obtain a sense of intimacy with others in small and large groups (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958).

If clients could learn these basic interaction skills, they would obtain some of the instruments necessary for further self-directed growth.

DEVELOPMENT AND DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKSHOP

The Communication Skills Workshop was developed over a period of 1 year prior to the present research. During each of the three academic terms of that year, the workshop was revised to the format described here. During this first year some initial research was conducted using Shostrom's (1968) Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) and Schultz's (1967) Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation—Behavior (FIRO-B). As no controls were included in the design, the results were not conclusive. However, within the experimental population there was significant movement on 7 of the 14 subscales of the POI and on 2 of the 6 scales of the FIRO-B, using a pretest-posttest procedure. These initial results provided encouragement for the implementation of a more systematic research design to be described in the next section.

The Communication Skills Workshop is a 7-week structured workshop with 2-hour sessions once a week and one 7 ½ hour session. Between total group sessions, participants also attended five weekly meetings with a smaller subgroup.

The composition of a workshop group consists of from 6 to 12 members, comprised equally of men and women if possible. Combining participants with a variety of social skill needs into one group facilitates interaction and change. There should be one male and one female facilitator, although

use of a single facilitator would be satisfactory.

The minigroup is composed of three or four workshop participants, and insofar as possible it maintains an equality of the sexes. Following the third session of the workshop, the minigroups meet once a week between sessions for 5 consecutive weeks. No facilitator is present during these minigroup meetings and no time limit is designated for them to meet, although specific tasks related to self-disclosure and the practice of giving and receiving feedback are assigned.

Five methods are employed in the process of facilitating change in the Communication Skills Workshop: structure, self-disclosure, feedback, behavior change goals, and intimacy.

1. *Structure.* The workshop sessions and minigroup meetings are composed of a specific series of exercises, tasks, assignments, and procedures that provide the workshop with a definite structure. Since the facilitators' role is one of leadership during these sessions, the anxiety that is usually present in unstructured groups is reduced. In the minigroup meetings, participants answer specific questions about themselves, using the format of the "Dyadic Encounter" (Pfeiffer & Jones, 1969). The structured approach demonstrates to the workshop participants that good communication is not a mysterious act but can be learned as a result of acquiring specific interpersonal skills.

2. *Self-disclosure.* The format of the beginning sessions of the workshop is designed specifically to encourage appropriate self-disclosure and to develop a trusting group environment. In developing the supportive environment, participants are able to take greater risks in disclosing to others their thoughts and feelings. This process is reinforced in the minigroup meetings. Because of the open-ended nature of the questions provided, each participant can compare the extent to which he can reveal his thoughts and feelings to other members of the minigroup.

3. *Feedback.* After an adequate level of trust has been reached, the workshop ses-

sions focus primarily on the process of feedback. The feedback model and "Johari Window" (Luft, 1963) model is explained and discussed. The format of the workshop at this time involves exercises and tasks related specifically to teaching participants the skills involved in receiving and giving feedback. Videotape recording and replay is used as a supplementary means of providing feedback, allowing the individual participant to see himself as others see him.

4. *Behavior change goals.* The concept of behavior change implies a process of identifying and determining specific ways of behaving differently, to which an individual becomes actively committed. Each participant, with consultative help from other group members, identifies one or two specific behavior changes he wants to work on during the session, for example, increasing the number of times he initiates interaction with other participants or increasing the number of negative feedback statements he makes. At the end of each session, each participant then rates each other participant on how he did that day on his specific behavior change goal. This provides not only immediate feedback to each participant but also teaches the participants a means to change their own behavior.

5. *Intimacy.* The minigroup meetings provide participants the opportunity to become more intimately involved with two or three other people. This is partially achieved by having the participants respond to statements or questions that increase the process of self-disclosure.

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of a structured communication skills workshop designed to enhance the interpersonal relations of clients who perceived themselves as inadequate in establishing and maintaining such relations. It was hypothesized that participation in the workshop would result in reduced anxiety associated with interpersonal situations and a positive change in the participant's characteristic behavior toward others.

Subjects

Subjects consisted of 30 Colorado State University undergraduate students, 16 males and 14 females. They had come to the counseling center

seeking assistance for interpersonal problems and, as a result of an intake interview, had been referred to the Communications Skills Workshop. When asked to rank their reasons for coming to the counseling center according to the Apostol-Miller diagnosis system (Apostol & Miller, 1959), all the students ranked emotional first, as their "problem goal," and ranked the "causes" in the following averaged order: conflict within yourself, lack of information about yourself, lack of skill (social), conflict with others, and lack of information about your environment. Subjects were similar in age, ranging from 18 to 25, and had a model classification of Junior.

Instruments

Three instruments, the FIRO-B, the Concept Specific Anxiety Scale (CSAS), and the Interpersonal Relationship Rating Scale (IRRS), were used as the index of change. The FIRO-B is a measure of a person's characteristic behavior toward other people on the dimensions of inclusion, control, and affection. It assesses two aspects of behavior in each dimension—the behavior an individual expresses toward others and the behavior he wants others to express toward him, and it is comprised of six scales—expressed inclusion, wanted inclusion, expressed control, wanted control, expressed affection, and wanted affection.

The CSAS (Cole & Oetting, 1968) consists of 15 seven-interval, bipolar semantic differential scales and is

designed to elicit anxiety responses to specific stimuli or situations as opposed to more global anxiety inventories that yield trait measures of anxiety. Its primary function is to provide a means of discriminating among concepts and situations in terms of their capacity to provoke anxiety responses, and it allows for the prediction of avoidance behaviors in individuals in specific stimulus situations [Dinges & Oetting, 1972, p. 147].

The CSAS was applied to four specific stimulus situations: (a) how I feel in expressing feelings of caring or liking to another person; (b) how I feel in expressing disagreement with another person; (c) how I feel initiating a conversation with a person of the opposite sex; and (d) how I feel sharing my personal beliefs and opinions with others. These stimulus situations were derived from an analysis of behavior change goals established by previous workshop participants.

The IRRS (Hipple, 1971, 1972) was developed specifically to test for outcomes in growth experiences. The items were written to measure attitudes and/or behaviors in the individual's relationships with others and in his self-perception. The instrument consists of 24 7-point numerical rating scales and is best analyzed in terms of average group ratings on the individual scales. The instrument

has been utilized successfully in assessing change related to human relations workshops.

Procedure

All subjects attended an orientation session 1 week prior to the beginning of the workshop. During this meeting, a contract indicating commitment to full participation and attendance was signed by each participant, the workshop objectives were presented, and the three instruments were administered. Then the subjects were randomly assigned to two treatment groups and a waiting list control group. One treatment group consisted of 8 subjects (4 males and 4 females), and the second treatment group consisted of 7 subjects (4 males and 3 females). There were 15 subjects in the control group (8 males and 7 females). Students in the control group were assured participation in the next workshop. Coleaders (1 male and 1 female) were in each of the treatment groups, and all 4 leaders had previous experience in running similar groups. Three of the 4 coleaders were permanent staff, and 1 was an undergraduate paraprofessional. The two treatment groups received the Communication Skills Workshop. Posttests were administered to both the control group and the two experimental groups during the last week of the workshop, resulting in an 8-week time lapse between the pretesting and posttesting for all subjects. The criterion measures were the six scales of the FIRO-B, the 4 total scores on the CSAS (obtained by summing the ratings for all 15 semantic differential scales), and 24 item scores and the total score on the IRRS. Group means, standard deviations, and t tests (McNemar, 1969) were calculated for significance of differences between correlated means, using two-tailed t tests, and for uncorrelated means, using one-tailed t tests. The scores for the two treatment groups were combined for this analysis.

RESULTS

The mean differences and standard deviations of the difference scores for the six FIRO-B dimensions, the four CSAS items, and the IRRS items and total are reported in Table 1. Only those individual items on the IRRS yielding significant t ratios are listed. They are as follows:

- Item 2—awareness of the feelings of others,
- Item 4—tendency to trust others,
- Item 5—tendency to seek close personal relationships with others,
- Item 6—tendency to build on the previous ideas of others,
- Item 7—ability to influence others,

TABLE 1
DIFFERENCE SCORES BETWEEN PRETEST AND POSTTEST SCORES FOR EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS; DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CORRELATED MEANS

Scale	Experimental ($n = 15$)		Control ($n = 15$)		t ($df = 14$)
	M_D	SD_D	M_D	SD_D	
FIRO					
EI	-.93	2.46	.46	1.64	1.39
WI	-.87	2.82	.40	2.11	1.66
EC	-.27	2.37	.23	2.06	1.15
WC	1.13	2.92	1.20	20.3	1.38
EA	-1.84	2.93	-.34	1.95	2.93*
WA	-.86	2.23	-.67	1.73	1.41
CSAS					
1	11.96	14.26	2.69	10.64	3.83*
2	12.87	14.23	5.60	15.23	2.54*
3	13.40	18.73	5.57	16.06	2.70*
4	12.41	9.29	4.00	10.08	2.21*
IRRS					
2	-1.20	1.67	.20	1.93	2.16*
4	-1.40	1.88	-.23	1.94	2.17*
5	-1.74	2.02	-.20	1.54	2.94*
6	-1.60	1.74	-.20	1.53	2.45*
7	-1.06	1.58	.43	1.26	2.98**
11	-2.20	1.91	.27	1.42	3.50**
12	-2.41	1.45	-.46	1.35	2.87*
13	-1.27	2.21	.07	1.04	2.52*
14	-1.14	1.40	.00	1.35	2.51*
16	-1.33	1.63	-.27	1.81	3.40**
23	-1.50	1.61	.00	1.59	3.53**
24	-1.80	1.52	.53	1.68	3.93**
Total	-22.20	12.72	-1.20	12.25	6.04***

Note. Abbreviations: FIRO = Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation—Behavior, CSAS = Concept Specific Anxiety Scale, IRRS = Interpersonal Relationship Rating Scale.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

- Item 11—reaction to others' comments about my behavior,
- Item 12—willingness to discuss feelings and emotions with others,
- Item 13—level of self-understanding,
- Item 14—level of self-esteem,
- Item 16—level of openness,
- Item 23—clarity in expressing thoughts,
- Item 24—degree of independence.

For the FIRO-B dimensions and IRRS scales, a negative mean difference indicates improvement, whereas the reverse holds for the CSAS items. The significant t ratios on

TABLE 2

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS AT PRETEST AND POSTTEST; DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UNCORRELATED MEANS

Scale	Pretest				t ($df = 28$)	Posttest				t ($df = 28$)
	Experimental		Control			Experimental		Control		
	M	SD	M	SD		M	SD	M	SD	
FIRO										
Expressed inclusion	3.80	2.11	3.13	1.68	.97	4.73	1.98	2.67	1.95	2.86**
Wanted inclusion	4.53	3.46	3.93	3.57	.49	5.40	3.11	3.53	3.02	1.67
Expressed control	2.73	1.91	2.66	2.23	.09	3.00	2.24	2.43	2.08	.09
Wanted control	5.00	2.22	5.20	2.48	.16	3.93	2.49	4.00	1.94	.08
Expressed affection	2.40	2.91	2.93	2.39	1.13	4.26	1.60	3.27	2.01	1.49
Wanted affection	4.80	2.83	6.00	2.14	1.32	5.66	2.87	6.67	1.80	1.16
CSAS										
1	59.87	15.34	70.26	10.54	2.12*	47.93	14.12	67.58	12.43	4.04***
2	67.00	11.38	64.06	10.60	.51	54.13	13.04	63.46	25.78	.58
3	64.20	16.50	74.57	11.46	2.20*	50.80	15.43	69.00	13.42	3.45***
4	56.13	11.52	65.80	13.94	2.07*	43.73	8.37	61.80	15.19	3.14**
IRRS										
Item 2	4.76	1.40	4.73	1.71	1.23	5.96	.94	4.53	1.80	3.26**
Item 4	4.06	2.10	4.20	1.79	.28	5.40	1.05	4.43	1.47	1.45
Item 5	3.80	1.82	4.60	1.50	1.53	5.56	1.12	4.80	1.62	1.36
Item 6	4.20	1.93	5.13	1.15	1.34	5.80	1.15	5.33	.72	1.34
Item 7	3.80	1.69	3.86	1.13	.98	4.86	1.19	3.43	1.10	2.26*
Item 11	4.07	1.67	4.53	1.19	.87	6.27	.70	4.26	1.33	5.28***
Item 12	3.56	1.64	4.20	1.47	.30	5.97	.99	4.66	1.67	2.62**
Item 13	3.80	2.11	3.73	1.03	.11	5.07	1.27	3.66	1.40	2.87**
Item 14	3.66	1.11	3.80	.86	.36	4.80	1.08	3.80	1.26	2.50**
Item 16	4.13	1.55	4.06	1.33	.42	5.46	1.06	4.33	1.54	2.63**
Item 23	3.40	1.12	3.00	1.31	.44	4.80	1.26	3.00	1.25	3.75***
Item 24	3.46	1.26	5.06	1.44	.42	5.26	1.40	3.53	.71	4.21***
Total	65.25	9.30	62.25	5.25	.15	87.45	10.20	63.45	7.95	7.27***

Note. Abbreviations: FIRO = Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation—Behavior, CSAS = Concept Specific Anxiety Scale, IRRS = Interpersonal Relationship Rating Scale.

* $p < .05$.
 ** $p < .01$.
 *** $n < .001$.

the CSAS items indicate a more significant reduction in anxiety for the experimental group than for the control group on all four of the interpersonal situations assessed.

Table 2 reveals the significant differences between the pretest mean scores and posttest mean scores of the experimental and control groups on those variables listed in Table 1. The two groups differed significantly on only 3 variables at pretest, whereas they differed on 14 variables in regard to the posttest.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study support the Communication Skills Workshop as effective

in working with the "socially awkward" college student. The significant change on the expressed affection scale of the FIRO-B indicates an increased recognition of the need to establish and maintain satisfactory relationships with others in respect to love and affection. Behaviorally, according to Schutz, this implies additional efforts to become close to people by expressing friendly and affectionate feelings and trying to be personal and intimate.

The reduction in anxiety associated with the four interpersonal situations of the CSAS could indicate a decrease in avoidance behaviors in those situations and an implied increase in approach behaviors. The

students who participate in the workshop would more likely express feelings of caring or liking to another person, express disagreement with another person, share personal beliefs and opinions with others, and initiate conversations with people of the opposite sex.

The workshop participants also showed clear, positive movement on the IRRS. The participants perceived themselves becoming better communicators—being more aware of the feelings of others, building on others' ideas more frequently, expressing their thoughts more clearly, being more acceptant of others' comments about their personal behavior, more willing to discuss their feelings and emotions with others, being more influential, and more willing to establish close interpersonal relationships—becoming more trusting and open toward others, and actively seeking such relationships. They also reported themselves to be more independent.

Based on the instruments utilized in this study, a strong relationship appears between expressed client need, workshop objectives, and self-reported behavioral outcomes. The results indicate that the Communication Skills Workshop had a behavioral impact on the participants. This impact occurred as the result of a structured (packaged) workshop that had as its thrust the teaching of specific interpersonal communication skills. Since the program is structured, it can be hypothesized that paraprofessionals can be trained and utilized as coleaders in the workshop. Although paraprofessionals have been utilized in conducting the Communication Skills Workshop to date, no study has been undertaken to determine if there is a differential impact. The use of paraprofessionals would open the way for wider supervised usage of the workshop.

Concurrently with this research, pilot efforts using the Communication Skills Workshop on other populations were conducted. One such pilot effort was conducted in a residence hall setting where the participants were referred by their respective resident advisers. These were students experiencing difficulty in establishing friendships

and in becoming involved in floor activities. Another workshop was conducted in the college of education with students preparing for their student teaching experience. Data are presently being collected and analyzed on these populations. Additional research is needed to test the effectiveness of this type of packaged workshop across disparate client populations.

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